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# A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, TORONTO,

ON THE

FOURTEENTH DAY OF DECEMBER, 1838,

BEING A

DAY OF PUBLIC FASTING AND HUMILIATION,

APPOINTED BY AUTHORITY.

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BY THE REV. W. T. LEACH, A. M., EDIN.,

Minister of St. Andrew's Church, Toronto,

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## DISCOURSE.

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HOSEA V. 15.—“In their affliction they will seek me early.”

THE religious sentiments of a people among whom any sense and knowledge of religion exist, are generally awakened in times of public calamity. It is experienced at such seasons that the results of the ordinary course of human conduct cannot be depended upon with certainty, nor anticipated with the same intensity of cheerful hope as when the state of things is regular and settled. When the great bonds of society are violently strained, the interest of the individual is found to be implicated in the public evil, and the little plots and private schemes of adventure that compose the drama of life and business of men, are often entangled and knocked up in the general confusion and alarm; people begin to lose their reckoning; rumours come floating from all parts of the land, and create most extensive mischiefs by mere exaggeration; the heavens gather blackness, and the gale that tries the toughness of the creaking mainmast stretches too severely the slender ropes that depend upon its steadiness, and twine round its top. The timid and luxurious are the first to feel alarm for the new duties which a change of scene may probably demand from them. To be called upon to suffer, to make sacrifices to the exigencies of the times, to be exposed to danger and removed forcibly from one's old habitudes and dependencies—these ask patience, fortitude, and decision of principle. The larger portion of society, when the state of public affairs is peaceful and prosperous, have no greater care than the gathering in of the sheaves of their har-

vest. They are satisfied with things as they are, and give their own powers, natural or acquired, the credit for the production and continuance of such a state. The earth is theirs and the fulness thereof; they can command its advantages; its pleasures come at their bidding and it seems to have been made for their satisfaction and prosperity; no God interposes a visible agency; human will alone seems to be the great agent in human affairs. In such circumstances men are under a *lesser necessity*, to speak unspiritually, of applying to God. They imagine they can afford to live without any lively acknowledgment and profound impression of a supreme superintending providence. But when this common state or relation of things, is broken up, we begin to recognize the fact that the dominion of God is not confined to the armies of heaven, but that he rules likewise among the inhabitants of the earth; to feel that we are dependant upon a power whose arrangements are made without asking our advice, and whose decrees are brought to pass without consulting our conveniency. We then perceive that he can either prosper or afflict us, that he can either reward or punish us, and by the pressure of external calamities can extort from us the confession that there is a God who reigns, a Divine and Sacred Majesty, in whom alone we live and move and dwell.

National calamities have always been interpreted as the judgments of God—his method of animadverting upon the wickedness of men, and one of his means of correcting it; for doubtless they are preceptive as well as punitive. They are the sharp arguments by which he instructs his creatures in the right. The same angel that has a commission to destroy, has an errand of mercy to perform, and that errand is performed, and the whole design of God in such calamities fulfilled, when people have sense enough to feel the bitterness of their sins, to be penitent before God, and to return from the error of their ways. God has not thought it sufficient for the good of mankind to send them words of advice, and instruct them in such lessons of heavenly wisdom as he has published to the world from time to time. They, in their darkness, may reject these; they

may be too wicked and brutish to discern their beauty and estimate their value. He has therefore reserved to himself, and is still pleased to exercise, the high prerogative of afflicting and even destroying those who offend him. To make the worst better, and to improve the good, he chooses for himself the season and the way of making heavy the weight of his paternal arm upon them. Even the fine gold he purifies in the fire; even over the daughter of Sion he spreads the thick thunder-cloud of his anger. By these means all men that are capable of understanding anything, are taught to connect their afflictions with their sins. At any period of public calamity, therefore, a day of Fasting and Humiliation may be reasonably appointed; such an appointment coincides with a natural sentiment; its observance is required in strict conformity with both our natural and religious obligations.

The chapter from which the words of our text are taken, contains a formal accusation against the house of Israel and the house of Judah. At that epoch of Jewish history, ten of the tribes of Israel revolted from their lawful ruler, who, agreeably to the form of government and practice of the Jews, had been anointed to his office by divine authority. The tribe of Judah alone persevered in its allegiance to the ancient constitution. The nation was accordingly divided into the loyal and apostate, but it happened that both had offended God, and both parties were therefore subjected to punishment. Their disunion and mutual hostility were severely punished. They reaped the fruits of anarchy in the consumption of national prosperity, in the disgraceful weakening of their principle of self-defence, in the infatuation of their counsels and their abandonment to the baser passions that work so terribly when society is passing into disorder and dissolution; and God was pleased to make known to them by a message from Heaven, communicated by the Prophet, the special cause of their afflictions and disasters, and even distinctly to tell them that their afflictions would endure as long as their sins, and be proportioned with severe justice to their enormity. But he declares that in their afflictions they will seek him early.—

How merciful such afflictions then ? How admirable the grace and forbearance of the Almighty to make the ills of life a discipline for the production of piety, righteousness and peace.

That such may be the fruits of the public calamities that have fallen upon us, it behoves us, every man for himself, to make inquisition into his own transgressions. Let every one have recourse to the simple plan of recollecting what his past life has been. Seriously reflecting upon the ways in which he has hitherto walked, let him scrutinize with jealous care, however painful it may be, the motives of his actions and the sources of his errors, imploring the divine mercy for the deserted duties and boldly committed sins of the past, seeking too from Heaven the guidance and assistance of the Divine Spirit to keep him from evil in the time to come. If he have the heart to do so, he may avail himself of this day of Fasting and Humiliation, to thank God that his chastisement has been so gentle, that the day of his sin was not the day of his death, and that time has been allowed him to give battle to the depravities of his own nature, and strike in for the rewards of Heaven and immortality. It were enough to make the melancholy considerations of such a season tolerable and even acceptable, to recollect that we enjoy what no miserable sinner that has descended quick into the jaws of hell now enjoys, an opportunity of propitiating the God of our fathers, and that we are not yet such wretched creatures of His as not to call upon the name of the God that made us. When this self-inspection and insight into our own souls, shall have laid open to us our depravity and danger, we shall then see that no formal or external shape of godliness will do, that no mere belief, however intense it may be, in the traditions of former times, no customary way of serving God with the lips, with words and phrases, or even with feelings and passions, will promote our moral and spiritual regeneration,—nothing but the kind of spirit that is God's, the same spirit that dwelt in the bosom of Christ.

To the inconsiderate it may seem vain and superfluous to apply to God in a solemnity of such degree, on account of the outrageous



incursions of a number of houseless and expatriated men. Were that the only evil, it were indeed a superfluous solemnity. The only duty that should then devolve upon us, would be, that implied in such a warrantable interpretation of the will of God as this, when the wicked are violent let the good be strong to overmaster them. But this is not the only evil already experienced, or to be apprehended in future. The full amount of it is not composed of the murders already perpetrated ; of the expense and endurance sustained in the suppression of lawless invasions ; nor of our commercial difficulties, the undervaluation of property, the turning aside of the stream of emigration, leaving the earth unpastured, and therefore barren, and its mills useless for want of grist ; these, although you should add to them the sense of insecurity and the spectral terrors that oppress the timid looking to distant events, are evils not the most momentous in the judgment of him who is ambitious of the honour of his countrymen—the earth's best blood, and their improvement in everything good and divine.

These are only the exponents of the evils that more immediately afflict us ; they are the manifest effects of that licentious imposture which, having been long suffered to practice upon the ignorance, the imagination, and passions of the population of the province, has at length persuaded many persons to believe, that the support necessarily given to the functionaries of the Government is “ a consuming glory in which their liberties are destroyed.” Our calamities are to be traced to the moral corruption that has seized upon the spirit of the land—that corruption which has been efficacious for the production of a common belief and understanding that the pious and profane, the wise and the foolish, the base and the honorable, are indiscriminately worthy of esteem, and equally capable of conducting a commonwealth to its highest degree of felicity and excellence, and that a form of Government which has this principle of equality for its basis, is alone safe and desirable—conclusions contradicted by the order of Providence, and every decree of God made known to us in the book of the history of man. We may not say with Plato that

every wicked man *ought to be* a slave, although he generally becomes one; but it is difficult to see what any one can have to object against being obliged to do what is truly good at the same time for himself and others. If he is under no such obligation, then his case must stand in one or other of these predicaments, that he is obliged to do what is not truly good, or obliged to do nothing. To the first point it is not necessary to speak anything; with regard to the other, it is easy to see that for every man to be under no obligation and restraint, is the perfect triumph of iniquity. Every man is in that case his own legislator, and every law which he enacts will be introduced of course with the significant preamble—"I will do it if it pleases me." His conscience only remains to serve him with a process for any enormity he may commit, but his self-love and appetite may be the keepers of his conscience, and he has always a willing executive in his hands, his feet, and his teeth. No one can suppose that any degree of excellence of individual character, is likely to be exemplified in such circumstances; and as a great portion of this class or description may be expected to emerge in every political body, it is evident that whenever their votes shall be most numerous, their triumph is accomplished; and our tendency to this depraved state of moral sentiment is, in my opinion, the root of our calamities.

Since we were last called upon publicly to humble ourselves before God in a similar manner, and for similar reasons, it must be confessed that as a people, we have fallen into a still larger arrear of transgressions. We have been making additional plunges into barbarism. By the pressure of circumstances, we have been still advancing in unpeaceableness and revengefulness. Be the cause what it may, we are neither so tranquil nor contented, nor so studious of the good arts that belong to a happy and well combined society. In addition to the elements that work their perfect work of confusion in the midst of us, we must permit the wickedness of other men, it seems, to make us wicked. Instead of acting within the terms of such a settled and constitutional course of conduct as may ennoble us in the history of mankind, and mark us out as a high-souled and

generous race, struggling for what is best in the conscious strength of manhood, has nothing been done, it may be asked, that can neither be sanctioned on earth, nor ratified in heaven? If we shall suffer ourselves to become assimilated in character to the enemy with whom we contend, and do the sort of things which they do, we shall become in process of time, and that rapidly enough, as miserable a crew as subsist in the wilds of Kentucky, or in any creek and crevice of the Western hills. As the latest colonists of the American Continent, it behoves us to exemplify in a superior degree the spirit of the race we have sprung from. Our departure from their practice can only be interpreted as a proof of our weakness; and what is the cause of that weakness but our disunion and insubordination? As little as possible need be said of that grasping and scrambling which, protracted to the present, has made the heart of the country faint and weary, and which, if henceforth prolonged, must of necessity render it fainter and wearier still. It is possible that we all may have erred, and therefore it becomes us, as we are this day called upon, to prostrate ourselves before the face of the heavenly throne; to collect our scattered thoughts from the mountains of vanity; to fast and to humble ourselves before God; to confess the greatness of our transgressions, and acknowledge the justice of our punishment.

The idea of connecting the prosperity of a people with the performance of the duties of a holy religion, is thought by many but a priestly invention, and very vague relation of cause and effect; but this error of theirs is a radical one, and is just as extreme as bad as those debasing superstitions which long corrupted the morals of mankind. Men in their natural revulsion from these, found in a licentiousness a state accommodated to the low degree of their moral and spiritual character. The rage of the south-wester is replaced by the chill fury of the north-wester. In neither extreme is either the truths of God or human happiness to be found, but between these there remains the whole body of sacred and indestructible truth that is necessary for the well-pleasing of God, for the regeneration of the individual, and well-being of society.

We believe that the duties prescribed by our holy religion, is sufficient for all the ends of society ; while it must be confessed, that so perverse sometimes is the interpretation of its truths, and that it is so easy to prevail upon any class of men to believe that God is a party in their cause, when their cause is one that advocates their liberty to do what they like, that we should despair of its efficacy for good, were it not a historical fact sufficiently proved in the whole course of the navigation of human affairs, that mankind have been bettered by it in every condition of their existence. All experience corroborates the reasonableness of its claim to our reverence and admiration, and adds its testimony so unequivocally to the conclusions of reason, that we may admit it for certain that we cannot well subsist without it, and that no good we can propose to our fellow-creatures is *truly good*, that is based upon any other foundation. This is a principle of political economy of a very ancient date, having been taught from the first day of man's creation until now, standing its ground yet as well as any of them ; and notwithstanding all the exceptions that may be adduced, and all appearances to the contrary, it may still be regarded as a law of our being, that our estate is good only in proportion to the degree of our resemblance to God, and this resemblance is the end of our faith and the salvation of our souls.

The laws of a country are best that are founded upon an explicable principle of justice,—and in most Christian communities, the rules of Christianity have materially modified the articles of their civil laws ; so much so, that we may unquestionably consider our own, as the nearest approximation to perfection that has been made. But for all that, they are justly to be charged with a portion of our afflictions, on account of a certain impracticable roughness on one point, that had no business to be found in them, when applied to this province of Upper Canada. Though this be allowed, there are sins enough remaining to humble us, the burden of which no art can transfer from our shoulders to the stony table of the law. Nor ought any effort be made to lay our sins at the door of those who have administered it. It is easy for us to know what we like



best, but not so easy for any man to judge what is best for the whole ; and it were most inexcusable ingratitude not to hold them worthy of the greatest honour, whose practise is, rather to abide by the letter of a Constitution than suffer one article after another to be changed and blotted out ;

" *Vir bonus est quis ?*

*Qui consulta Patrum, qui leges juraque servat."*

But to whatsoever quarter we go in order to trace the source of the sins from which our afflictions have arisen, we shall have to return speedily to the place whence we started. These afflictions can serve no good end, and may justly be considered as the fore-runners of others much more severe, unless they lead to the disclosure of our sins.

Look to the ill-return we have made for the blessings which God has so long bestowed upon us, and our unmindfulness of his past deliverances. In contemplating the natural advantages of the land in which we live, we cannot but advert to its great extent and fertility, yielding treasures of plentiful harvests, and affording to the industrious and intelligent, a sure though laborious remuneration ; to the vast extent and number of the inland Lakes, together with the flow of that majestic river, which afford the means of a far extended commerce, and may be the receptacles and emporiums of an almost boundless trade ; we cannot but advert too even to the healthfulness of its climate, by which we are saved from those periodical ravages and desolating calamities which in tropical climates so often scatter destruction and death. The pestilence which walketh in darkness and the destruction which wasteth at noon day, have been, though but recently, yet rarely experienced. All these are the bountiful gifts of Heaven, which, however, they may be overlooked by us, ought undoubtedly to warm the heart, to call forth the praises and excite the gratitude of every serious and reflecting mind. But these advantages would be comparatively of small importance were they not accompanied with others.

This was once a peaceful and happy country ; none in which a greater measure of personal and political liberty could be enjoyed. No despotism grinded the faces of the poor, darkened the fair scenes of nature, and converted the habitations of men into abodes of misery. There was the enjoyment of personal liberty ; there was security of property ; there was the desire and endeavour to open up new sources of national prosperity. It is not very many years ago since the fathers of this country, its original settlers, "broke the heart of the wilderness."\* They pitched their habitations in a land, then an inhospitable and grim solitude. They were supported, however, under their privations. Their wants were supplied, and though they had to encounter many formidable evils, there were many more from which they were delivered. The frontier settlements of the old Colonies were often laid in ruins by the angry incursions of the native tribes, and liable to a constant terror from their successful attack—an attack from creatures whose best use of a triumph, seemed to them to consist in the use of their tusks, the tomahawk and scalping knife. Little more than half a century has elapsed since the first settlement ; and when we reflect, how much prosperity and happiness have since that time been enjoyed—how much has been done in the way of *fixing* and improving the social edifice—how much has been effected towards a universal and just administration of the laws, without which the hesitations of men are but dens of rapine, filled only with mangled and unburied bones—how much has been done in the way of extending the means of religious instruction too, notwithstanding the obstacles that have arisen and might naturally have been expected to arise ; when we consider these things, together with the great increase of population, and the external improvements which have been made, I am sure they ought to be regarded as instances of the favour which God has shown to this young country, granting it even in its earliest youth, advantages which have been bestowed upon all other lands only after ages of the severest trials. Such are some of the important advantages with

\* "Our fathers," says Mr. Isaac Lundy, "our fathers broke the heart of the Canadian wilderness."

which we in this country have been blessed, but which like all other, blessings we have undervalued, because we have long been accustomed to their use. One would think they had been sufficient to cause us to seek God early, and that the sharper and more stimulating motives awakened by affliction would have been unnecessary.

Look again to the deliverance which the providence of God accomplished for us last winter, and think of our unmindfulness of that. Had this country been subjected to the miseries of an intestine war, which the successful issue of that conspiracy would in the highest degree of probability have occasioned, all the past advancement which has been made in civil and religious affairs, would have been counteracted. There must have taken place a prostration of all law. The organised system, which secures justice between man and man, which restrains and punishes, and thereby prevents the disorders that arise from their malignant passions, their inhumanity and their revenge, would have at once been effectually broken in pieces. A course of mutual retaliation and suffering would have speedily convinced us, that our lines had fallen in unpleasant places. It must have effected an invasion of all the decencies of social life, a subversion of all cheerful and comfortable existence, a substitution of force and violence for reason and persuasion. The brute would have travelled undisturbed among every man's corn. A state of constant terror more intolerable than death, of suspiciousness and foreboding, and at last a state of *want*—fields of weeds and desolated gardens, would have banished to other quarters of the globe as many as had the means of betaking themselves to a place of quietness and order. Many centuries might have passed away before its political and social interests were based upon so strong and broad a foundation. When we look therefore to the miseries which we were allowed to escape from, had we no reason to be mindful of that deliverance of God's, by which he left us in the enjoyment of so many mercies and saved us from so many evils, doubtless with a view to give us time to repent and reform.

Now, it may be asked, have either the blessings which we have enjoyed, or the deliverances we have experienced, or even the afflictions which hitherto have been sent us, reluctantly as it were, and as light as possible, have these produced the effects that might have been expected? Have they made us more alive to the turpitude of impiety and to the necessity of promoting and encouraging such impressions of religious truths as may prove really beneficial to human character. We find that God has never thought proper to bless with any long course of prosperity any country where unrighteousness had no curb, and where impiety was no disgrace: Than the absence of these there can be no surer sign of dissolution, for when we consider how many diverse principles and various materials enter into every social mass, how many wild and headstrong passions are to be controlled, how many contending interests, how many envious and malicious and ill-stifled bloody purposes are to be kept in awe, how much clamorous ignorance and grasping ambition are to be withstood and regulated; when we consider in what manner this mighty flood of evil is prevented from overflowing its banks, we can discover a sufficient means of security and peace, only in the moral character of a people; produced by the constant practice of the duties which religion prescribes. What else is it that changes the strength of wickedness into weakness? The restraining power of the civil law, had it no broader foundation than its mere utility, were but a frail barrier, and wickedness would find its crooked way where no lash nor bonds of the laws could reach it. It is true that there is a natural sense of what is right that often flashes conviction upon the soul of a criminal, and inspires with intolerable fear the heart of a murderer, let him hide himself in the thickest and darkest bush. But how is this natural sense to be renewed where it has become nearly extinct? And how is it to be improved to any high degree, without a constant reference to God in all the events of providence, and in the actions of our lives. We wonder at the wickedness of the world, when we ought to wonder at the defectiveness of the means we have employed to prevent it,—when instead of laying broad and deep the



foundation of a system of moral and religious instruction, we believe that God will send the means of security and peace, which we never sought for, and force upon us a blessing we scarcely seem to desire; for if these means, to be found in the practise of a holy and unexceptionable religion, *have been* sought for, and have been deemed a very desirable blessing, why have they not been employed? Why has the country to deplore that flood of civil crimes that has lately inundated it?

The worst and most brutish state of all, and one of the severest afflictions we have to fear, is when the passions of corrupted nature are let loose to their own fury, unrestrained by laws divine or human; when one person looks with distrust in the face of another, as not being sure of a friend or a foe,—when there is no faith in the transactions that men must daily have with one another, and when the whole will probably become bankrupt of that national confidence which is so necessary to prosperity in this human world. Besides, what then becomes of the sacredness of an oath, and who will be secure from the perjury of scoundrels, the breath of whose nostrils is the fee of wickedness. When ten thousand men “that neither fear death nor hell,” can be brought together and unite in a quarrel of their own, all rule is nearly at an end, and the stage is prepared for the perpetration of any wickedness.

But this is the sort of thing that is to reign and triumph among us, unless good men shall combine, and put a bridle in the jaws of the bad. In the course of half a century, you who have imported with you the sentiments and honourable intelligence of your race, may cease and depart from the face of *this* earth, without leaving a footmark behind. It is not the first time that this new world has been colonized, and the colonists swamped by the inundation of barbarism; and there is the same tendency and danger still, though mightily mitigated. Our chance of a permanent retention of all that looks to perfection among men is the best, because the last. We have the advantage of all that have gone before us in civilized

life. We can see the rocks upon which they split, and the shoals upon which they are well nigh foundering. We can now see, if we can see anything, and fully appreciate the fact, that the human being is not yet so perfect but that the greater mass in every community would be lawless and wicked, but for the restraints that oblige them to be social and prosperous. No prospect can be worse to a good man than to have these restraints, which are the silken cords of society shaken and shattered. He sees that there is no chance for him in existence, if the malice of his own human nature is not encaged. The remotest prospect of such a state of disorder and ungodliness is enough to justify our fears; and the remotest *tendency* to it calls for humiliation before the face of God. The prospect of this ought to awaken our fears of Divine anger; and that this quickening and powerful motive might have its due influence on us, the piety of the Lieutenant Governor, in this day of Fasting and Humiliation, has, in the true spirit of Christian patriotism, engaged our attention to it. If there be any judgment near us, any evil consequent upon our transgressions to be apprehended, as unquestionably there are, let us lose no time in our application for mercy. Every dissuasive from sin and every call to repentance should be heard with the same impression as if we saw the grave of our country's honour open, and our own graves dug and measured for our reception. The greatest curse of war is, not to be slain in it, but to imbibe the fiendish principles of those with whom we combat. The greatest calamity of war is not to be conquered, but to be conquered by those who will entail upon the land an ungodly spirit and degraded state of humanity. From these evils, human wisdom and power is no sure defence, though walls of fire and brass should encompass us round; we still lie open to the artillery of heaven; and if God have a quarrel with us, our case is hopeless. Let us hasten, therefore, to avert, by our repentance, the just anger of God. Let us resolve, each in his station, to oppose as far as we are able, the growing corruption. Let every one cast away his own iniquities, and while he has time and space for mercy, try to cleanse and purify his heart from every low, selfish and dishonorable end. Then shall the cloud which has so long settled between the land and heaven rend in twain and separate. Then shall the voice of our prayers be heard in heaven. No evil shall approach us or destroying angel come near our dwelling. The providence of God shall watch over us, and his loving-kindness defend us as a shield. If in our affliction we seek God early, let us believe he will save us from the evils of time, and reward us with joys that are everlasting.

AMEN.

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